Bonifatius

(c. Mid 4th Century - c. 432)

BRIEFING

Bonifatius (or Bonifacius; also known as Count Boniface or Comes Bonifacius; died 432) was a Roman general and governor of the diocese of Africa. He campaigned against the Visigoths in Gaul and the Vandals in North Africa. An ally of Galla Placidia, mother and advisor of Valentinian III, Bonifacius engaged in Roman civil wars on her behalf against the generals Felix in 427-429 and Aetius in 432. Although he defeated the latter at the Battle of Rimini, Bonifacius suffered a fatal wound and was succeeded by his son-in-law Sebastianus as patricius of the Western Roman Empire.

BIOGRAPHY

Early Career

Bonifatius first appears as a general of Constantius III in 413, where he defeated the Visigoths of Athaulf at Massilia; he allegedly threw a weapon and wounded the Gothic king himself. Later that decade, Bonifatius was known to be a tribunus commanding a Gothic regiment of foederati in North Africa campaigning against the Mauri, and had a friendship with St. Augustine of Hippo with whom he discussed theological matters. In 422 he was likely recalled to the Western court in Ravenna, where he probably married his Gothic wife Pelagia, daughter of Beremudus, and inherited her father's bucellarii. Bonifatius and Castinus then prepared to launch a campaign against the Vandals and Alans in Spain, but Bonifatius' forces never arrived as the two commanders had quarreled constantly since its inception. Galla Placidia sought to prevent Castinus from gaining the position of Stilicho before him, and as a result Castinus attempted to remove Bonifatius from power. Bonifatius retreated to North Africa where he acquired the command of comes africae under dubious circumstances and continued his campaigns against the Mauri tribes. After the death of Emperor Honorius the primicerius notariorum Joannes was elevated to the throne by Castinus in 424, and Bonifatius responded by cutting off the Grain supply from North Africa, showing his support for the Theodosians (Placidia and Theodosius II).

Prosper states that Joannes' forces were weakened because they were campaigning against Bonifatius in North Africa, but were unable to depose him like in the campaigns against Gildo and other North African usurpers. After a revolt in Gaul and a military campaign under the eastern generals Ardabur and Aspar sent by Theodosius II, Joannes was overthrown, and Valentinian III, half-nephew of Honorius, was made Western emperor by the magister officiorum Helion. Bonifatius supported him, and resumed the grain shipments to Rome, being rewarded the position of comes domesticorum in return.

CIVIL WAR IN 425

The Roman Civil War of 425 was a short civil war between the West Roman Emperor Joannes and the East Roman Emperor Theodosius II. After rising tensions, battles took place in Italy between the armies of both halves of the empire. Despite this, the conflict did not end by battle, but as a result of a conspiracy in which the Western emperor was captured and killed shortly afterwards.

Background

Already at the beginning of his reign on November 20, 423, Joannes was not recognized as emperor by the eastern court in Constantinople, but considered as a usurpator. After the death of his predecessor Honorius, the nephew of the eastern emperor, he was pushed forward as a successor by Castinus, patricius and magister militum (commander-in-chief) of the western army. His reign was not recognized in the North- African province, ruled by comes Africae Bonifatius.

The Civil War

In 424, diplomatic tensions between the two imperial halves continued when Theodosius named his nephew Valentinian as Caesar of the western part with his mother Placidia as Augusta. Prosper writes that an Italian field army unsuccessfully fought against Bonifatius and that the western army was weakened by the losses there. The bucellari, the strong private army of Bonifatius, played a decisive role in this.

Joannes feared an attack from the east and sent his general Aetius on a mission to the Huns for military aid.[6] Before this help arrived, Theodosius decided to take action and ordered his chief commander-in-chief magister militum Ardaburius to overthrow Joannes Reijn. Ardaburius prepared his army, commanded the fleet himself and sent his son Aspar by land through Dalmatia to Italia. The eastern army landed in Aquileia early 425 and took the city in no time. Some time later, Aspar's field army arrived and joined Ardaburius' main force.

Soon after, battles broke out between the western and eastern armies, with Ardaburius accidentally falling into the hands of the western army. With regard to this event, the sources are vague and contradictory. According to Prosper, the imperial court at Ravenna was attacked and taken. John of Antioch, on the other hand, argues that a shepherd led the army of Aspar safely through the swamps that protected the city and that local allies opened the gate for them.

Nevertheless, the captured commander-in-chief was well treated by Joannes. Maybe the emperor hoped to reach an agreement with Theodosius II. According to Stewart East West Ardaburius, during his captivity, he persuaded a number of Western Roman officers to commit a coup against Emperor Joannes, which they succeeded in doing. The Ravenna garrison opened the gates to the Eastern Roman army after which the emperor could be taken captive.

End

After his capture, John was beheaded in May 425 after a hand had previously been knocked off from him. Three days after his death, another battle took place between Aspar and Aëtius, which ended in a draw. Aëtius then entered into an agreement with Ardaburius and Aspar and entered the service of the new Western Roman government. Valentinian III was appointed emperor in the West shortly afterwards. Castinus, the commander-in-chief of the Western Army, was removed from office and then exiled.

CIVIL WAR WITH FELIX

Briefing

In 427, Bonifatius was recalled to Ravenna by Placidia, but refused the summons. Bonifatius was accused of attempting to form his own empire in Roman Africa at the allegation of Flavius Constantius Felix, who had also been a staunch supporter of Placidia and had been installed as the magister utriusque militiae of the west by Theodosius II. Placidia ordered Felix to send an army to restore the vital province in response. Felix's generals for the expedition included Mavortius, Gallio, and Sanoeces. Mavortius and Gallio led Roman forces proper, while Sanoeces commanded the Hun Foederati troops. Together the three generals laid siege to Bonifatius at Carthage. The three besiegers, however, turned on each other, and Sanoeces and his Huns killed the Romans before he was killed himself, which lifted the siege. When news reached Ravenna, Felix sent the Comes Sigisvultus against Bonifacius, who campaigned with his Goths in Africa for two years. Sigisvultus captured Carthage, but Bonifatius and his Gothic bucellarii continued to campaign in Numidia, where they were allowed to loot the province. Bonifatius also had his daughter baptized by an Arian priest, which caused a falling out between him and St. Augustine. However, Placidia sent an envoy to Bonifatius in 429, from which she learned that a letter had been forged ordering him not to return to Ravenna if summoned. A man named Darius was sent to negotiate a truce between Bonifatius and Sigisvultus, and as a result Bonifatius was restored to Placidia's favor and the civil war ended in time to face the Vandal threat.

Prelude

In 425, the West-Roman emperor Joannes was overthrun by an intervention by the East-Roman emperor Theodosius II. After this, Valentinianus, the son of the late emperor Constantinus III was crowned Western emperor in Rome. Because he was only six years old, he could not rule the empire himself. Several high-ranking persons interfered in the exercise of the emperorship, including the emperor of the eastern part of the empire Theodosius II (his cousin), his mother Galla Placidia and the commander-in-chief of the Roman army (magister utriusque militum) Castinus.

Boniface, who had played a key role in the restoration of the Theodosian dynasty in the West, was only rewarded with the function of comes domesticorum (commander of the imperial house troops). Not Bonefatius, but the hitherto unknown Felix received the highest generalship of the western field army. With Boniface who had counted on this high office himself, this appointment put evil blood.

In this appointment can clearly be recognized the hand of the East Roman emperor Theodosius II. Castinus who was serving this function before, was removed and exiled because he was Joannes ally and therefore considered unreliable. Another general of the ancient regime Aëtius had made a deal with the new regime that gave him the high office of Praefectus praetorio in Gaul. Bonifatius was not satisfied with his new appointment. He refused to give up his position as comes Africae of the African dioces (provinces) with which he separated himself from the rest of the empire.

The Civil War

The first step that led to the civil war was taken by Felix in 427. He had the Senate declare Bonifatius as an enemy of the state after he refused to appear before the court in Ravenna, to answer for an indictment of high treason. In the charge, Bonifatius was accused of wanting to create his own empire in Roman Africa. The indictment was drawn up by Felix, his opponent installed by Theodosius II as the magister militia of the West. After this, an army was prepared to overthre Bonifatius in Africa.

Felix equipped a large army commanded by three generals: Mavortius, Gallio and Sanoeces. Mavortius and Gallio led the actual Roman troops, while Sanoeces commanded the Huns Foederati troops. Together, the three generals besieged Boniface in Carthago, where Boniface had entrenched himself. However, during the siege, disagreement broke out between the commanders. One of the generals murdered his two colleagues to be murdered by Boniface in turn (Prosper s.a. 427). When this news reached Ravenna, Felix sent a new force to Africa under the command of the Gothic general Sigisvult. He succeed to conquer the coastal towns, after which Boniface withdrew with his troops into the interior of Numidia. For the whole of 428, no more fights took place and a truce was struck.

According to Procopius sent Placidia an envoy to Boniface in 429 to negotiate peace, from whom she heard that a forged letter was in circulation in which Boniface was advised not to go to Ravenna if asked to do so. As a result, Placidia sent a negotiator Darius to conduct the talks on her behalf. This one managed to iron the folds, the war could be ended. Boniface's position at court was restored, with which he was again assigned an influential role. Nevertheless, the imperial envoy Darius confessed in a letter to Augustine that there was still enmity between the two parties.

Aftermath

Despite having to take on three imperial armies in less than five years, Boniface remained undefeated. At the same time, the course of the last years of civil war indicated the limits of his private power. His quarrel with Ravenna meant that Boniface could only rely on his Gothic bucellari. In exchange for their support, it was permissible for them to provide for their own sustenance by plundering the locals. At the same time, the daughter of Boniface was baptized as an Arian priest. In these circumstances, Bonifatius could only resign, it would cost him the friendship of Augustine.

The negotiations that led to the reconciliation with Ravenna in 429 that restored the relationship were just in time to face the Vandal invasion. Soon, Bonifatius was involved in a new war. For fourteen months they Vandals would besiege Boniface in the city Hippo Regius. Augustine would not experience the end of the siege and died in the summer of 430. An auxiliary army was sent from the combined forces East and West under the command of Aspar. After a second defeat, Placidia called him back to deal with Aëtius, while Aspar remained in Africa to keep the Vandals under control.

Thanks to his Gothic bucellari, Boniface was the first Roman soldier to successfully defy and resist state authority. When the central government tried to deject him, he separated from the empire without proclaiming himself emperor, which had always been the usual course of events of rebels to legitimize their position. Boniface carried the personal loyalty of his troops and was able to lead them at his own discretion during this war, in exchange for providing protection - even at the expense of the Roman people. All these elements made Boniface the first successful exponent of what can be described as 'warlord' in the Western Roman army.

Some sources report that Bonifatius invited the Vandals to Africa, though doubt has been cast on this in recent years. The Vandals crossed near Roman Tingis, and an inscription at Altava dated to 429 mentions the deceased was wounded by a "barbarian" during the Vandal advance across Africa. Their campaign was briefly halted by Darius, who negotiated a brief truce, but Gaiseric quickly resumed. Bonifatius, the African army, and a contingent of supporting Gothic foederati confronted and were defeated by Gaiseric near the city of Calama in 430, after which Bonifatius retreated to the city of Hippo Regius. In May or June of 430, Gaiseric laid siege to the city, and St. Augustine died during the siege, which was finally lifted in July or August of 431. Leaving it at the mercy of Gaiseric, Bonifatius retreated out of the city to join his forces with the Eastern Roman general Aspar, who had been sent to reinforce Africa by Theodosius II. In early 432, Bonifatius and Aspar engaged Gaiseric in battle, but were again defeated. Allegedly, the future emperor Marcian was captured in this engagement, but released after Gaiseric had a vision of him becoming Emperor.

In 432, after Flavius Felix, his wife Padusia, and a deacon had been hanged by the Roman army, allegedly at the instigation of Flavius Aetius whose power she sought to resist, Placidia appointed Bonifatius magister utriusque militiae and patricius of the west, despite his unsuccessful record in Africa. Bonifacius led his forces against Aetius and the Gallic army at the Battle of Rimini in 432. Bonifacius and his son-in-law Sebastianus were victorious, and Aetius was allowed to retire to his private estates, although Bonifatius was mortally wounded by a lance during the conflict. He died sometime between a few days and three months after the battle. Sebastianus, appointed to fill his place, attempted to have Aetius assassinated, only for Aetius to flee to the court of the Huns and return with their support. Allegedly Sebastianus was preparing to fight Aetius by summoning the Visigoths to his aid, but he was evidently unpopular among the troops and allowed them to engage in piracy, and had lost support in the court as well. Sebastianus was exiled, and as a result Aetius became the dominant power in the Western Roman Empire, and married Bonifacius' widow Pelagia allegedly at his request.

WAR OF BONIFATIUS

The Roman Civil War (432) was a military conflict between the Roman generals Aetius and Bonifatius during the reign of Emperor Valentinian III. This war took place on Italian soil and was decided in the Battle of Rimini. Despite Aetius losing the battle, the civil war ended in his favor, because Bonifatius was wounded in battle and eventually died of his injuries.

Besides the two generals, Galla Placidia was an important player as regentes. She made a not insignificant contribution to this conflict during her regency in the years 429 to 432. She was unable to prevent her two main generals from fighting each other instead of fighting the Vandals in present-day North-Africa and the Huns in Pannonia. With her decision in 432 to deprive Aetius of his command of the Roman army in favor of Boniface, she effectively created the basis for the arise of this conflict.

Background

Boniface and Aetius were both ambitious generals who emerged in the turbulent period after the death of Emperor Honorius in 423. They became involved in a series of political and military confrontations, including Joannes (423-425) who was proclaimed emperor by the Senate against the heirs of Honorius: his wife Galla Placida with her minor son Valentinian and his cousin Theodosius II, emperor of the East Roman Empire. In 425, a civil war broke out that was won by the heirs of Honorius. After this, Aetius, who supported John, was promoted away to the province Gallia and Boniface, a follower of Galla Placidia, ended up on a sideline.

Bonifatius disagreed the course of events as it went after the fall of John. Therefore he refused to leave his post in North Africa. Through his marriage to the Gothic Princess Pelagia, he had a private army of mainly Gothic Bucellari and the regular army in Africa, the Comitatenses, had remained loyal to him. This allowed him to be independent and to take his own course.

A new confrontation arose when a plot against Boniface was forged in 427. Bonifatius separated North-Africa from the empire. That period is known as the Civil war of 427-429. In this conflict, Boniface and the commander-in-chief of the Roman army Felix were each other's opponents. This conflict ended when Galla Placidia reconciled with Boniface. Aetius kept himself during this conflict aside until he was ranked to the rank of magister militum in 429. This was the junior rank of the two functions of comes et magister utriusque militiae, whose senior position was held by Felix, who was thus the most influential man in those years, and also a supporter of Galla Placidia.

Prelude

After Bonifatius had left Ravenna in 429 to reconcile with Galla Placida, he returned to North Africa to campaign against the Vandals. They had conquered Mauretania Tingitana and Mauretania by 430 and now began to invade the Numidia region, where Bonifatius was waiting for them with his army. In the Battle of Calama, the Romans were defeated by the Vandals in early 430, after which Bonifatius withdrew to the city of Hippo Regius which was besieged from May 430. During the siege, the famous church father Augustinus died. After 14 months of siege, Bonifatius left the city to the Vandal King and withdrew to join forces with the East Roman general Aspar, who arrived from Constantinople with an army by sea. In early 432 they joined against Geiserik, but the Romans again were defeated.

Reportedly Felix began after the promotion of Aetius, a conspiracy against him, but Aetius was Felix ahead and planned an assassination attempt. In May 430, Felix and his wife were murdered in the Ursiana Basilica in Ravenna. After Felix's death Aetius obtained the position of senior magister militum. Nevertheless, he left Italy to return to Gaul, where he defeated an army of plundering Goths near Arles, turned around and began a campaign in the Alps against plundering Iuthungi and Bagaudae in Raetia and Noricum. According to Wijnendaele, these actions of Aetius were carried out without the approval of the imperial government in Ravenna, and his campaigns in Gaul and Noricum were the result of the unwillingness of the army or of his Huns to participate in an overseas campaign against the Vandals in Africa. Instead of this he suppressed the raids in the north from where he easily could monitor the imperial seat of Ravenna, before campaigning against the Franks.

After the execution of Felix in 430, Aetius and Bonifatius remained as the most influential generals of the empire, both fighting for the favor of Placidia. In 432, Aetius held the consulate, an honorary function, but Bonifatius was recalled to Italy in that year, warmly received by Placidia and received the rank of patrician, also an honorary function. In addition, she gave him the senior comes et magister utriusque milities (commander-in-chief) position, while Aetius was deprived of his military command. With these decisions she created an explosive situation.

The War

Aetius, who believed his fall was now imminent, openly revolted against the imperial authority in Ravenna. He marched from Gaul against Bonifatius who stayed in Ravenna. Aetius had brought his own army from the West that he originally intended to deploy to the Suebi in Spain, while Bonifatius had some of his troops from Africa with him, most bucellarii and the Italian fieldarmy. The two warlords competed against each other five Roman miles outside of Arminium (the current city Rimini) in 432.

When the battle was over, Bonifatius had triumphed, but he would not enjoy his victory for long. He was injured during the battle and a few months later he died of a slaughter wound.

Battle of Rimini

The **Battle of Rimini** was fought in 432 between the two strong men of the Western Roman Empire, the very recently deposed *Magister Utriusque Militiae* Flavius Aetius and the newly appointed *Magister Utriusque Militiae* Bonifatius (Bonifacius or Boniface).

In 430, Aetius had the *Magister Utriusque Militiae* Flavius Constantius Felix executed by the army, as he was allegedly plotting against Aetius. According to Wijnendaele, Aetius was lured into confronting Bonifatius by being appointed Consul in 432, where he was deposed and Bonifatius appointed by Galla Placidia. Aetius and Bonifatius then departed the court of Ravenna, gathered their *bucellarii*, and met five Roman miles outside of Rimini. Aetius had brought his own troops from the West where he had intended to confront the Sueves, while Bonifatius had brought part of his troops from Africa, most likely being composed of his personal *bucellarii* and local Italian troops. Allegedly, Aetius had a longer lance and utilized it to spear Bonifatius in personal combat during the battle. Bonifatius, though victorious, was mortally wounded during the battle and died several months later. He was succeeded by his son-in-law, Sebastian, who tried to have the retired Aetius assassinated. Aetius fled to the Huns and returned possibly with a large army of Huns. Sebastian, who was unpopular with the army and the court, was exiled and Aetius quickly became the *de facto* manager of the Western Roman Empire.

Aftermath

After Bonifatius' death, his son-in-law Sebastianus took over his position as commander-in-chief and continued the battle in Italy. He tried to capture Aetius who had retreated to one of his fortified estates in Italy after the lost battle. However, Aetius managed to flee and sought a good get-over with the Huns in Pannonia. Here he traveled to the court of his friend, the Hun King Rua, and after acquiring a new army, he returned to Italy.

With the help of this army, Aetius became the winning party. He reconciled himself with Galla Placidia who again offered him the title of es et magister utriusque militias (commander-in-chief). Aetius then had Sebastianus exiled from Italy, seized the properties of Bonifatius and married his widow Pelagia. Aetius eventually had become the great victorer of this civil war an also became the most important Roman of the west. Galla Placida no longer played a meaningful role and in 437 she had to take a Seat when her son Valentinianus III became an adult. Valentinianus would turn out to be a weak emperor.

With the death of Bonifatius, a period where several generals had fought for the power of the West Roman Empire, had come to an end. This episode would not be without consequences, because it eventually cost the empire the important provinces Mauretania Tingitana, Mauretania Caesariensis, Africa and Pannonia. Aetius remained as the only one of the 'war lords' and had thus become the actual ruler, however he chose not to become emperor himself. With this decision, he broke the monopoly of the Western imperial government on violence, paving the way for future warlords- commanders and the disintegration of the Western army in the second half of the fifth century.